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THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

A bibliographic essay is a narrative discussion, a review, of the literature of a [topic](#). It is the equivalent of a conversation in which someone not only advises you about "what's out there" but shapes that raw material into a coherent survey of the materials available. Like all bibliographies, the bibliographic essay enumerates sources and, like an annotated bibliography, it describes and analyses them; it goes beyond performing these functions, however, to comparing, contrasting, and evaluating the relationships among works. A bibliographic essay thus draws a picture of the literature of a topic, and in so doing, unlike a list and like an essay, it tends to take a position and establish an interpretive point of view.

To compile a bibliographic essay, begin by asking two related questions:

1. Who is writing? That is, who is writing what and publishing or purveying it where and to whom? Elaborate this question by asking further questions:

- * who are these writers (professional academics, professional writers or "persons of letters," amateurs, Indians or non-Indians, men or women, etc.)
- * what might their background have to do with their writing and the body of material on Indians
- * what kinds of information or documentation are the authors using or creating
- * what scholarly, commercial, or private organizations are publishing or purveying materials, and who is their audience

2. What are they writing about and how are they writing about it?
Elaborate this question by asking further questions:

- * what are the theories, conclusions, images, or points of view in these materials
- * what assumptions do they make or question
- * what do they leave out
- * what are the problems, issues, and points of contention or debate
- * how do works go about presenting their argument, and what kinds of evidence, expectations, traditions, and images do they call upon or evoke

In addition to these questions about individual sources, your essay will also want to account for similarities and differences among works. You will want to investigate changes over time, geography, and demography as to whose work and what ideas, points of view, images, and representational strategies are influential, as to how the available material has developed in terms of themes, emphases, subjects treated, historical methods, modes of representation, groups of authors or schools of thought, etc. All of these questions lead to building the "compare and contrast" superstructure that characterizes the bibliographic essay.

With such questions in mind, how, at a practical level, do you go about gathering sources to read?

1. Survey a number of works. Your survey will identify and locate candidates for reading. In addition to hints from class reading and discussion and advice from your professor, you can survey the possibilities in two ways, namely, 1) by using the reference works listed on the accompanying bibliography and 2) by using Tripod's library catalog. Although a Tripod subject search may seem the obvious step, using reference works will be advantageous because they will give the names of authors and

titles that, while they might be in Tripod, might not turn up in a subject search because of changes in cataloging practice over the years. Moreover, a Tripod subject search might turn up so much that you will not be able effectively to work with the retrieval; in this case, reference works will help to guide you in your choice of what to read. For most topics, then, spending some time with the reference and secondary literature not only will be a vital part of your research but should be the first step you take.

2. Legwork and scanning. To decide which books you will treat in your essay, look at tables of contents and indexes, read introductions, skim sections of each book. Those books on which you choose not to concentrate in your essay will become material for your footnotes or bibliography and for mentioning in passing. Remember that the purpose of a bibliographic essay is to advise people on what to read and that to do so you will have to demonstrate your command of the topic by being able to tell them about the books they do not need to read as well. In other words, the books you concentrate on will be the tip of an iceberg, the submerged body of which you will also want to sketch.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY TOPICS

1. Government relations with and legal status of Indians

- In various periods: colonial, early Republic, Jacksonian, post-Civil War
- Military campaigns and wars--(government reports, military memoirs, magazines)
- Treaties; relocations; reservations
- Indian policy of other imperial/colonial powers, e.g., France or Spain

- Bureau of American Ethnology--government scholarship
- Indian rights movement

2. Indians and (White) publishing media

a. Indians in popular and scholarly literature

- history textbooks
- general histories of the US, histories of regions or states
- specific events (Little Big Horn, massacres, Trail of Tears)
- poems and plays, music and songs
- encyclopedias
- ethnology/anthropology/sociology/linguistics
- Indians as ten lost tribes of Israel
- illustrations in books
- westerns (cowboys and Indians); dime novels
- captivity narratives
- reports of travelers and explorers
- missionary writings
- histories of tribes
- biographies of individual people
- U.S. Indians as seen by non-U.S. writers

b. Advertising and merchandising

c. Journalism--coverage of Indians in periodicals and newspapers

3. Indians in photographs and paintings

4. Quakers and Indians

5. Representations of male and female Indians

6. Reports of Indian travelers to the White world

7. Indian presence as an aspect of frontier life Indians and the West